

The New Black

The critics are raving and the New York crowd is going mad: FELA! A huge success now on Broadway

Tourists arriving to New York these days have the opportunity to see an entire crowd of theatre goers stand up on their feet and dance, not only at the ending of a musical, but during.

FELA! The most talked about musical in New York in the last few weeks, has infected the entire town with its African music and dance fever. The musical tells the story of Fela Kuti, not only the most important African musician of the 20th Century, but also one from whom a musical genre is named. The musical does great service both to the incredible musician and to African music and culture in general. The costumes are mesmerizing and the choreography is so spectacular and the songs are so inspiring that the audience simply cannot stay in their seats. The musical also stands out as a unique production, different from any thing that has ever been done in Broadway: Instead of an acted-out plot, Fela's life and revolutionary music is told through a series of monologues by Shar Nguajah, the actor who portrays his character.

The musical's journey to the Broadway stage is also an exceptional one. FELA! began as a small Off-Broadway production in a theatre that accommodated only 100 viewers.

Great reviews kept the crowd coming, yet it took another talented musician, one named

Jay-Z, to turn it into a Broadway musical. Jay-Z was so captivated by the music and the dances that he decided to invest money and bring the show to a broader audience. The actor Will Smith also loved the show and the duo together with the Jewish businessman Stephen Hendel became the musical's lead Broadway producers.

Either way you spin it, FELA!'s success is no trivial matter. Especially when you consider the fact that the show has no big stars in it and that African music received poor representation in Broadway theatre up until this time. Still, the New York crowd is going mad and the critics even more so. "There has never been anything like this on Broadway!" said *The New York Times* theatre critic. And if he says so, who are we to argue?